

The Clipper Visits ... Eileen Williams

By MARTHA HIMES

The walls of Dr. Eileen Williams' office are covered with apples.

Apple art, maps. As the superintendent of schools, Williams collects images of apples. The plethora of apple art on her office walls reflects her long career in teaching and school administration.



Williams started her teaching career in Yarmouth. After a stop in East Bridgewater, she moved on to become the Superintendent of the K-5 school in Raynham, where she stayed for six years. In 1993, she became the Superintendent of Duxbury's schools.

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Along the way, she earned a Master's degree, a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study, and a Doctorate in Education Administration from Northeastern University.

"I like school," she laughed. "Why else would I do it every day?"

Williams has worked longer in Duxbury than she has in any other community. She appreciates Duxbury's well-educated residents, the value they place on education, and the resources and support they give the school system.

However, that same interest heightens expectations for school performance. "The expectations are very high, and they're high on us, and on the children, in the arts, academically, and athletically, and so it's a challenge for all of us to meet those expectations," she said.

Another challenge facing Williams is teacher recruitment. Thanks to approximately eight faculty retirements annually and the expansion of the schools, she has hired an average of 20 faculty members a year for the past four years.

"We are still able to hire some wonderfully talented people, but it gets a little bit more difficult every year to find the quality of candidates that we are looking for as the pool dwindles," she said.

Williams, anointed as the nation-wide 2002 Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators, was also the 2001 President of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents. That extracurricular activity enabled her to become active in statewide education and funding issues.

One of her accomplishments in that arena was helping to convince the Department of Education to increase their square footage allotment for the school building assistance program, the same program that will be reimbursing Duxbury for its school construction. She is confident that Duxbury will be reimbursed as expected.

"That program's been in existence since the 1940s, and they have not reneged. Certainly between the 1940s and now we've had other very tight fiscal situations. I think if anything it might take longer for reimbursement," she said. "But I really firmly believe that we'll be reimbursed."

Williams says the construction project is on budget and on time, and expects it to be complete by this time next year. Students will begin moving into the new buildings this winter, while the older buildings are renovated.

The superintendent feels the performing arts center is a critical part of the project. "We needed the performing arts center because our arts program is so large," she said. "We have so many different bands, different choral groups...that we no longer have the stage facilities to be able to support them."

Williams hopes to rent the center out to area arts groups, such as the South Shore Bay Band or the Plymouth Philharmonic, to generate an income that will offset the building's maintenance expenses and enable the center to pay for itself.

The next hurdle pertaining to the new construction will be the reconfiguring of the pre-school, elementary and secondary schools. This task will entail the reallocation of space, the development of new traditions and new communities, and the creation of full-day kindergarten.

Other goals for the 2002-2003 school year include incorporating the recommendations of last year's Student Sleep Needs Committee, teaching Spanish in kindergarten, and revising the teaching of writing to grades 3 and 4.

In November, Duxbury will host a visit from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the high school accreditation organization. This visit will be the first in ten years and the first since Williams became superintendent.

Williams is especially proud of the work she has done in the past ten years hiring and developing teachers. She's established a mentoring program to support new teachers, and a professional development program for all teachers.

"We've worked hard here to create an atmosphere where [teachers] know that we expect them to take appropriate risks in the classroom, to try new instructional methodologies, to try different ways to reach each individual child," she said.

"I just read an article that said there's no one way to teach anything, because if you have 22 students in the room, it takes 22 ways sometimes, because a methodology that will work

with one child doesn't work with the kid sitting next to him. It's really important that teachers have a repertoire of instructional methodologies, so that they can meet the needs of each one of those individual children."

Williams foresees a future where students have laptops on their desks, textbooks downloaded to their laptops, and work in study groups, with the teacher as the "guide on the side."

"The days of teachers standing at the front of the class and lecturing are waning quickly," she said.

If nothing else, Williams hopes her students learn to re-

spect themselves and others. "One of the things I've learned over time is that the things that are most important for us to give children are not the things that come in textbooks, as important as those are. It's really helping them to realize who they are and what life is about."

When she's not in school, Williams enjoys reading detective novels and traveling with her husband, Jack Beaucaire, information systems manager for the pharmacy at Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital. "We do weekend B&B trips and we've taken some wonderful trips to Australia and New Zealand," she said.

Williams and Beaucaire live in Bridgewater.